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RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON PRIORITY 3804
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI PRIORITY 1050
RUEHNY/AMEMBASSY OSLO PRIORITY 3876
RUEHOT/AMEMBASSY OTTAWA PRIORITY 1109
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO PRIORITY 2961
RUEHCG/AMCONSUL CHENNAI PRIORITY 7737
RUEHBI/AMCONSUL MUMBAI PRIORITY 5399
RUEHON/AMCONSUL TORONTO PRIORITY 0227
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 COLOMBO 000809

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DEPARTMENT FOR SCA/INS
MCC FOR S GROFF, D TETER, D NASSIRY AND E BURKE

E.O. 12958: DECL: 06/05/2017

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PTER](#) [PHUM](#) [MOPS](#) [CE](#)

SUBJECT: SRI LANKAN SECURITY FORCES IMPOSE TRAVEL
RESTRICTIONS ON NORTHEAST TAMILS; FORCIBLY REMOVE MANY FROM
COLOMBO

Classified By: Ambassador Robert O. Blake, Jr., for reasons 1.4(b,d).

1. (C) SUMMARY: On June 2, the Defense Ministry issued verbal directives to police stations in Colombo to evict from the city Tamils whose identification cards indicate they are from areas outside Colombo. According to local news media and Embassy sources, on June 6 and 7, police evicted Tamils from approximately 20 lodges where they were temporarily residing, loading hundreds of Tamil men, women and children into buses. One Tamil lodge owner told PolOff that 67 of his 129 occupants were taken, more than 90% of whom were from Jaffna. Evicted Tamils are sent to nearby police stations for "processing," and then are loaded onto police buses for deportation from Colombo -- often to locations other than their place of origin. A separate verbal Defense Ministry directive prohibits Tamils living outside Colombo from traveling for personal reasons to other government-controlled areas. Tamils traveling for business and "official" purposes must follow onerous permit procedures, which in some cases include registration with government-friendly paramilitary groups such as the Eelam People's Democratic Party (EPDP), to obtain GSL permission to move about. The moves caused an uproar in Parliament, where normal business was suspended and an emergency meeting of party leaders convened. Ambassador spoke with opposition leader Ranil Wickremesinghe and contacted Foreign Secretary Kohona to urge the GSL to implement less draconian procedures for dealing with security threats and avoid actions that might be seen as collective punishment in violation of Sri Lanka's constitution. END SUMMARY.

TAMILS STAYING IN COLOMBO FORCED TO GO "HOME"

2. (C) The Ministry of Defense has issued verbal directives to police to remove forcibly Tamils staying temporarily in

Colombo and return them to their previous homes in the North and East. Tamil citizens with identification cards listing their place of residence as being other than Colombo are not allowed to stay in Colombo for longer than two weeks, regardless of the purpose of their stay. Initially, on June 2, Colombo lodge and hostel owners were told to expel all non-Colombo based Tamils. Embassy interlocutors told us that only five Muslim-owned lodges complied. However, on June 6 police began clearing Tamils out of lodges located in the northeastern part of the city, and continued their efforts on June 7 in Tamil neighborhoods on the southern outskirts of Colombo.

¶3. (C) The Ideal Guest Lodge (strictly protect) owner, who declined to give his name, told PolOff that police and Sri Lanka Army personnel arrived together at approximately 8:00 a.m. on June 7 and began inspecting identification cards of all Tamil occupants. People with identification cards not listing Colombo as their place of residence were asked how long they had been in Colombo. Those who had been there for longer than two weeks were loaded onto police buses and taken to the local police station for "processing." The lodge owner stated that 67 of 129 of his occupants were taken, resulting in an expected loss of more than one million rupees (about \$9,000) to the lodge.

¶4. (C) According to the lodge owner, approximately 90% of his guests were from Jaffna, 80% of whom were waiting for immigrant visas from the Canadian Embassy. (Embassy has shared this information with the Canadian High Commission.) He stated that due to the difficulty in traveling from Jaffna to Colombo, even before this latest round of restrictions, Jaffna Tamils attempting to leave Sri Lanka to join relatives

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in Canada normally stayed in Colombo while the Canadian Embassy processes their applications. (Note: we confirmed this information with the Canadian High Commission here.) According to immigration attorney Thamboo, Canada requires a police "clearance report" in order for Sri Lankans to immigrate, but the backlog to obtain them is approximately six months. Several students awaiting visas to study abroad were also taken from the Ideal Guest Lodge, along with people receiving treatment at Royal and National hospitals. One elderly Tamil woman collapsed at the feet of a police officer in tears asking that she be allowed to continue her treatment at the Royal Hospital across the street from the lodge but was loaded on the bus along with the other occupants.

¶5. (C) The accounts conveyed to PolOff on June 7 were corroborated by other embassy contacts and by BBC and local news media reporting, all of which described hundreds of Tamils being evicted from approximately 20 lodges on June 6 and 7. There was less clarity on the destinations of the police buses carrying the evicted Tamils. Some were said to be bound for Vavuniya, others for Trincomalee. Because the GSL has closed the A-9 road connecting Vavuniya to Jaffna, it is likely that evicted Tamils originally from Jaffna will not be returned there but will end up elsewhere.

RESTRICTIONS ON TAMILS TRAVELING FROM NORTHEAST

¶6. (C) The Ministry of Defense has also issued verbal directives to police stations around the island prohibiting Tamils living outside of Colombo from traveling for personal purposes. Business and "official" travel is allowed if a complicated permit procedure is followed. A Tamil wishing to travel from the North or East to Colombo must first obtain written permission from the Village Authority, which authorization must next be certified by the local police commissioner. In the case of Tamils living in Jaffna, the Village Authority's permission must be certified by Jaffna Military Commander Chandrasiri's office. The file is then passed to the Army's Civil Affairs Office, which commissions the military to make an investigation into the Tamil

citizen's purpose of travel, including a search of the person's home. No Tamil will be allowed to begin the permit procedure without first registering with either the Civil Affairs Office or one of several government-friendly paramilitary groups, including Eelam People's Democratic Party (EPDP), the People's Liberation Organization of Tamil Eelam (PLOTE), and the Eelam People's Revolutionary Liberation Front (EPRLF).

17. (C) Because the travel restriction have been conveyed verbally to the police stations, confusion abounds as to implementation of the procedures and which purposes of travel are "business" and which are "personal." On June 6, at a monthly meeting for the Foundation for Co-existence, a Sri Lanka based NGO, Poloff was told that the travel restrictions are being applied inconsistently in Batticaloa and Ampara, while restrictions on persons apparently have not yet been implemented in Trincomalee. (However, no trucks are currently being allowed to proceed from Trincomalee to Colombo.) Allegations of corruption abound, with rumors that passes can be purchased, eliminating the need to comply with the onerous procedures. According to the Foundation for Co-existence's Ampara office director, the restrictions are apparently not being placed on Tamils working for certain paramilitary groups, including the Karuna faction.

PARLIAMENTARIANS REACT TO THE RESTRICTIONS

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18. (C) Upon learning that Tamils were being forcibly bused out of Colombo, several opposition party Parliamentarians protested vigorously in Parliament. Tamil National Alliance (TNA) Member of Parliament S. Kajendran tore up a copy of the Sri Lankan Constitution on the Parliament floor and United National Party (UNP) Parliamentarian Maheswaran removed his shirt in disgust. Normal Parliament business was suspended while an emergency meeting of party leaders convened to discuss what steps to take.

19. (C) Opposition leader Ranil Wickremesinghe called Ambassador to brief him on the Parliamentary protest. He indicated that the Party Whip had responded on behalf of the GSL that he had no information. Defense Spokesman Rambukwella subsequently told Ranil that the Tamils were all suspected of working with the LTTE. Ranil responded that if they were suspected, why were the Tamils not arrested? Rambukwella could not respond.

110. (C) Ambassador called Foreign Secretary Kohona the afternoon of June 7 to inquire about the basis of the Government action. He noted that the evictions appear to violate the Sri Lankan Constitution's article that every Sri Lankan is entitled to freedom of movement and the right to choose his or her residence. There was also concern that the Government was taking collective action against a minority group. Kohona reassured the Ambassador that the Government did not intend to clear Colombo of Tamils since forty percent of the city's population is Tamil. He explained that the Government is very concerned about the possibility of a major attack on Colombo, citing the recent interdiction by security forces of a truck filled with explosives. Given those concerns the police were instructed to ask those Tamils who had no "explainable cause" for being in Colombo to leave. The Ambassador responded that from our own independent inquiries, we had learned that at least some of the Tamils taken away in buses had been waiting to get Canadian immigrant visas which appeared to be an explainable cause. He also conveyed reports that those evicted had not been given a chance to explain why they were in Colombo. Kohona acknowledged that there might have been excesses, but reaffirmed the importance of protecting the security of Colombo. The Ambassador noted that the Government's actions were likely to garner considerable criticism. He urged that the Government consider an alternative course, such as

arresting anyone for whom there was clear evidence of possible terrorist intent, but to avoid actions that might be seen as collective punishment in violation of Sri Lanka's constitution.

¶11. (C) COMMENT: Longtime observers say these latest measures by the security forces are without precedent in the history of Sri Lanka's ethnic conflict. They are clearly in violation of Sri Lanka's Constitution, which states "Every citizen is entitled to freedom of movement and of choosing his residence within Sri Lanka." There are a number of constituents of the current governing coalition which will be deeply troubled by these developments. Most important, the ill-considered measures will certainly widen the ethnic divide -- sharpening the conflict, further reducing chances for a negotiated settlement, and increasing the motivation for Tamils to support the LTTE. A rebellion in Parliament, where the government depends on several minority parties for a majority, represents perhaps the most immediate prospect for causing the Defense Ministry to backtrack on its latest "security" measures.

BLAKE